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AUTHOR Corsini, Irene; Solity, Jeanne
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ABSTRACT

This article collects some of the many ideas that were generated in one of the workshop options at the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit Materials Conference. The ideas it presents illustrate the purpose of the workshop, which was to explore, discuss, and plan ways of using objects and visual material as a source for generating ideas and developing literacy skills. The focus of the ideas is on encouraging visual perceptions and awareness in the development of skills and ways of working in adult basic education. Four examples are provided that could form the basis for programs of work; the examples could be adapted for one lesson, a short course, or a term's work with one student or a group. The following objects or experiences that are available in one's immediate environment are used as a source for generating ideas and developing literacy skills: a cash register, a handbag (contents including a pen, keys, a cinema ticket, and a badge), looking through a viewfinder, and taking a walk. (YLB)

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Look around and pick it up

In this article Irenè Corsini (Basic Skills Co-ordinator, Mary Ward Centre) and Jeanne Solity (London Rathbone Development Officer) collect together some of the many ideas which were generated in one of the workshop options called "Look around and pick it up", at the ALBSU Materials Conference in 1985/6. The brief of the workshop was to explore, discuss and plan ways of using objects and visual material as a source for generating ideas and developing literacy skills. It also attempted to dispel the idea that you need a 'Suitcase' of worksheets and books to be effective.

The format of each workshop was designed to encourage the participants to seek out interesting visual material and to bring it back to the group or work on the spot! With this approach tutors and students use their immediate environment as a resource, anything that could be seen from a teacup to a mirror became the starting point for discussion, lesson planning and curriculum development. During all of the workshops many experiences and feelings were shared. A point which came up often in discussion was that many tutors, particularly those who are part time, may sometimes feel frustrated in their quest for new material and stimulating ideas to share with their students. It is not always possible to get our hands onto easily accessible resources, particularly if you are working at home with a student, in offsite premises or in a remote rural area. For many of us this is the reality of the job. In many instances, ourselves and our immediate environment are our only resource. Using visual material is by no means a new idea but sometimes we all need to develop the confidence to expand our approaches and use of them.

The central aims of the workshop were as follows:

a) For students and tutors to focus on their immediate environment as a source for generating ideas and developing literacy skills. To present the view that learning can be effective and fun if it emanates from shared student/tutor interest, needs and perceptions.

b) To encourage visual perceptions and awareness in the development of skills and ways of working in Adult Basic Education.

c) To explore the possibility that interesting learning materials are readily available around us, easily assembled and do not require a great deal of preparation.

d) To encourage greater student/tutor interaction and participation in negotiating, developing and evaluating their own curriculum.

This article presents a few of the excellent ideas that emerged from participants in the 3 National Workshops. It does not attempt to present a series of lesson plans. The ideas represented could form the basis for programmes of work which could be adapted for one lesson, a short course or a term's work with one student or a group.

We hope this approach will offer something that you may be able to use and that will work for you and your students.

We apologise for not being able to acknowledge by name the individual participants whose ideas we have used for the purpose of this article. However, we would certainly like to thank all those who contributed so enthusiastically and imaginatively in all the workshops.

Getting Going

Example 1. Cash Register

This is an example of one pair's findings. It may help to have a brief to get you going.

GO AND FIND IT

a) find one object of interest

b) ask yourselves why you have chosen it

c) ask yourselves which skills(s) you want to develop

d) decide how you might use the object as a stimulus to develop those skills

e) jot down your ideas

Using your brief take a good look around you, wherever you find yourself. Is there anything around you that you find immediately interesting or that has a visual impact? Try to negotiate with your partner about what you are going to use.

Decide which skills you want to develop with your student(s). Here are some aspects of reading, writing and oral skills that you and your students may choose to develop. These suggestions are *not* a definitive list, but are given as starting points.

discussion	expression	criticism
debate	fantasy	imaginative expression
ask questions/ giving answers	answers	clarity of expression
summarising	past/future	memory – recall
guessing	observation	spelling
labelling	detect detail	vocabulary
sequencing	precision	adaptation
anticipating	adaptation	drafting
listening	layout	note-taking
prediction	using a dictionary	abstraction
creative writing	handwriting	

Here is an example of one object found and how a tutor and student developed a framework of ideas. Brainstorm with your student around this.

This is what came out of one brainstorming session, ideas we jotted down during the discussion session:

Function/Money **Employment** **Self Assertion**

You may not want to work on all these ideas at once. Indeed, it may not be appropriate to work on all these aspects but it may be appropriate to select one or two areas depending on students' needs and interest. For example one pair looked at a variety of work which could be developed on the topic of money:

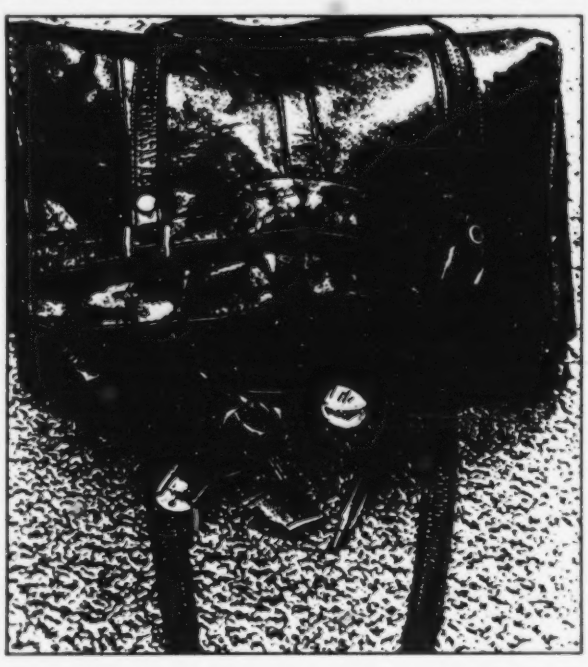
If you decide to take one of the other areas, it might develop like this:

Self Assertion

1. Social and life skills
2. Taking goods back, consumer advice, commercial law
3. Assertion training

Example 2 The Handbag

Even if you don't feel particularly inspired by any of the objects or space around personal belongings can suggest interesting personal journeys, for example we looked at "What's in your Handbag?"

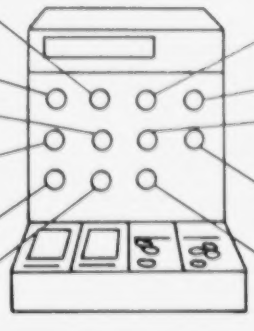


Here are the contents of 1 bag which a group of participants chose to look at asking questions such as:

1. Are there things that provoke memorable experiences?
2. Something that reminded you of a time, situation or co-incidence in the past.
3. Something misplaced or that you've forgotton to do.
4. Somewhere you've been.
5. Reminders of someone you've been with.
6. A letter, or note, to someone, or from someone.
7. Objects you do things with or identify with.

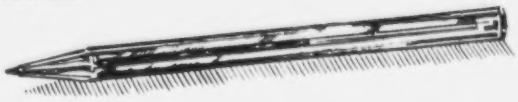
The following objects were found in the contents of one person's handbag:

1. Debt counselling
2. Management of money
3. Keeping simple home accounts
4. Cheques, cash and banking, form filling, etc.
5. Different currencies, exchange rates
6. Access skills research into the history of money, libraries, etc



7. New technology, computers how they've changed, computer skills
8. Role play, interviewing for jobs, business transactions
9. Investment/stock exchanges buying shares
10. Basic Maths + × =
11. Use of calculators, etc

A. A Pen

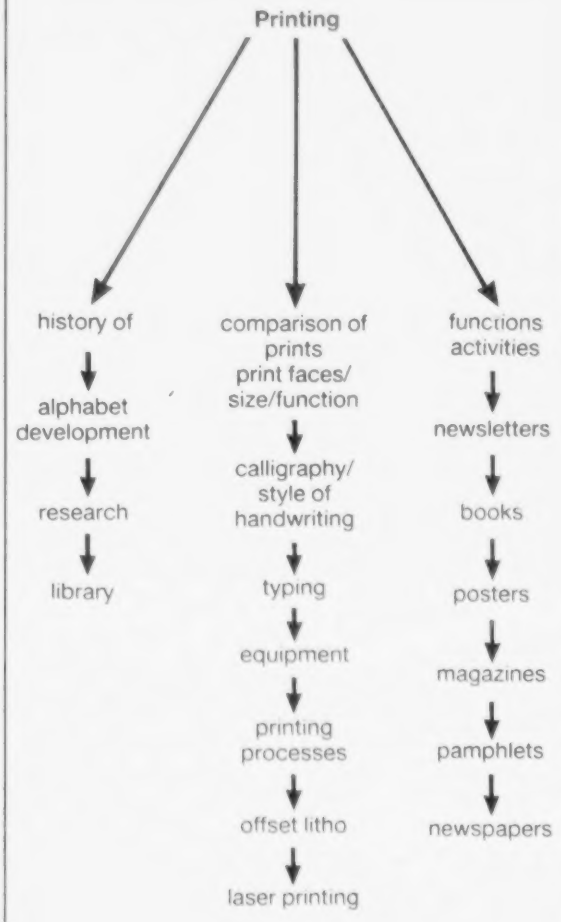


These were some of the ideas which were possibilities for the content of a lesson or programme of lessons:

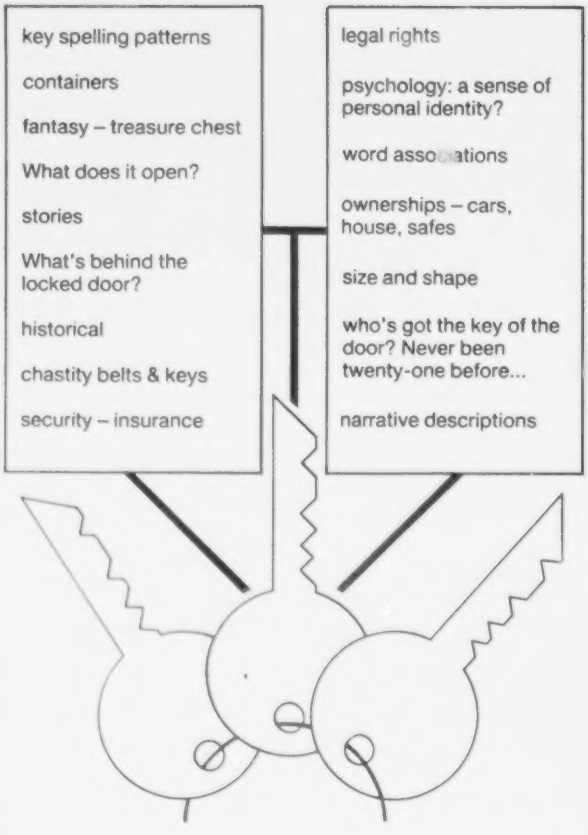
Calligraphy	Printing techniques/ different types of publications
History of the alphabet	Newsletters, Magazines
Alphabets and pictographs	Letter writing
History of writing	Scripts
Handwriting	Typewriters
Sign language	Publications and printing
Computer scripts/ printers/typesetting	

Choose one or two of any of the ideas produced from brainstorming to develop a framework for lesson planning.

For example



B. Keys



C. A Cinema Ticket

This is a good one for discussion, conversation or dialogue. It could include:

- What films are on?
- Why go to films?
- How often do you go?
- Critical writing on films
- Extracts and reviews
- Adapting films, storyline, characters and scripts
- Television and video
- Making your own
- Continental and Third-World films
- Writing a script for a doumentary
- Researching relevant information – reference library.

D. Badge

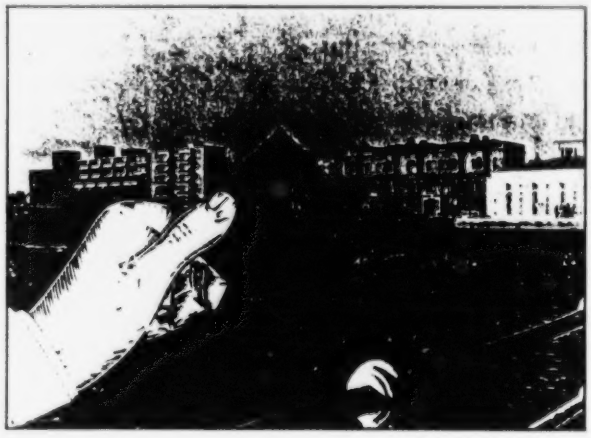
You can have fun with this one in pairs or in small groups – to develop thinking skills:

- find as many uses as you can for a badge
- compare different designs of badges, letterheads/logos and the organisation they represent
- why people buy them
- symbols and their place in writing
- who owns the badge?
- what sort of memories do they provoke?

This can lead on to writing and imaginative activities.

Example 3: Looking through a viewfinder

a) Using a simple piece of card focus on a view or landscape which catches your eye.

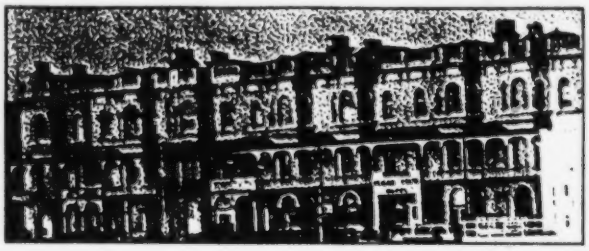


b) Think about and talk about why you have chosen that particular view and what you find interesting about it. Jot down all your ideas.

c) Decide with your students which skills you want to develop, refer back to the skills listed on page 2, if you feel this may be useful. For example one pair chose to develop certain aspects of discussion and writing skills.

DISCUSSION	WRITING
imaginative expression	creative writing
observation	layout
clarity of expression	criticism
memory recall	drafting
detect detail	spelling
	handwriting
	vocabulary
	sequencing

You could focus on one part of the view, for example: The Hotel.



Some workshop participants chose The Hotel as a starting point to plan a framework of ideas to develop over a possible 4-5 weeks.

HOTEL

decay:	haunted house – ruins vocabulary – description writing – discussion Story writing – Hammer House of Horror – films
Industry:	tourism – family provision – map reading facilities – research into availability increase/decline of tourism – charts
Social Issues:	Squatting – housing – homeless – facts/figures Housing for who? – cost of
Historical Aspects:	research into past history – before and after – using library – reference books – visits of interest

Try to experiment and use your viewfinder in lots of different ways – at a window, in a room, corridor, or outside the building.

Example 4: Take a Walk

If there is no reason why you can't go out of the confines of your normal working environment, taking a walk around may be another way of sparking off more ideas.

One pair took a walk along the beach and these are some of the topics which came out of observing that environment.

Changing light	historical aspects
Wealth	
Climate	cloud formation
Aspects of health	poverty
Tides	winds
Weather charts	
Temperature – Thermometer	air pressure

Conclusion

Many good ideas were produced in the workshops and we are only able to show a few examples. Using visual material in this way can be exciting and great fun. We hope you will at least "have a go" and try some of these approaches to see how they can work for you. Obviously they are not ideas that you will want to use every week but at least we can say it certainly put some life into lesson planning.

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA. Tel: 01-405 4017